A mere "scolding" seldom helps anyone—especially youngsters. I have found that children respond to parental admonition best when it is tempered with kindly concern.

The Birmingham Eccentric

PART TWO

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Tea for Two

. . . Visits with Birmingham and Women . . .

By NELLIE HURLEY MINIFIE

THREE years ago Mrs. Fred Gasow took stock of her white framed little farm home on Lone Pine road, weighed the set-up carefully and decided to become a rancher.

On a cold and blustery day last week she showed me about her little place, led me up and down several run ways where she keeps her stock and proudly exhibited numerous charts that clearly showed the meticulous care that has already gone into breeding better than 100 little animals that someday may be part of your fur coat, or of mine.

Mrs. Gasow raises mink, those carnivorous little mammals that belong to the weasel family and yield a highly valuable fur. Up and down those run ways we walked and proudly the fine points of the animals were shown to me. "See," she pointed a mittened finger, "how uniform the color is, how heavy the fur. That is the result of careful line breeding, of watchful tending and feeding."

In Four Foot Cages

In narrow cages probably four feet in length the mink scampered back and forth, up and down, their beedy little eyes always watchful, their noses twitching frantically. At the end of each cage a little wooden house with a neat bed of alfalfa was attached that the animals may come in out of the cold. The day I saw them, nearly all were cuddled into their houses away from the cold blasts, and they were shooed out into the pen only with difficulty.

Strangely enough, Mrs. Gasow told me as we walked back to the house, mink are one of the easiest animals to raise, much easier for instance, than dogs. They are clean, she insists, very little work and they offer no feeding problem at all.

Eighty per cent of the diet of a mink consists of horse meat, she told me. The balance of the ration is made up of cereal, whole milk, vegetables—either carrots or tomatoes—fish, cod liver oil, yeast and a combination of minerals.

Incidentally, the horses are killed right there on the farm, Mrs. Gasow explained. Old and decrepit animals are bought by the Gasows and the shooting, the butchering, meat boning and grinding is done right on the premises. One horse about every two weeks is about the average, she explained.

Ponies Solve Problem

Killing the horses was a problem, she admitted, until she bought for her daughters, Sally and Linda, two little brown and white ponies. There were many tears shed by the children when each horse was killed. Today the sting is somewhat compensated for by the two chubby little ponies that the girls can ride and call their own.

Her ranch was begun in 1937 with 10 female mink that she purchased already bred, Mrs. Gasow told me. In this, her third breeding season, she has more than 100 animals, all carefully line bred so that the fur color on each is almost nearly uniform and will, when finally pelted, provide nearly matched skins.

She had planned to pelt a few of the animals this year but when, a short time ago, she looked over the stock she found them in such good shape that she found it advisable to wait another season before selling the skins. She had thought that a few culls might be used this year but the nearly perfect stock caused her to change her mind. Another breeding, she thinks, may give her enough animals that she can easily spare a few for pelting.

Chart Shows Results

An elaborate breeding chart shows the results of the past years. Four kittens is a good average for a litter, Mrs. Gasow told me, although she has a litter of nine and one of ten.

Pelting, she told me in answer to a question, is usually done in November. The early cold this year has been particularly advantageous and her animals have primed up early. Watching the new coat come in is fascinating, she says. It begins with the long guard hairs at the tip of the tail and works up the back until the ears and nose finally turn.

Although they are singularly easy to care for, a few precautions must be taken with the animals. They are unusually sensitive to food poisoning and care must be taken to protect them from pneumonia. They must also be protected from the direct rays of the sun if a rich and abundant coat is expected. Last week's heavy wind storm had torn down much of the canopy that covered Mrs. Gasow's pens, she showed me.

Scarf Made from Culls

A gorgeously soft and rich brown fur scarf was brought fourth that I might see how the skins looked after they had been made up. Five skins comprised this fur piece that was made from the first year's culls. Marvelously soft and beautiful, this scarf has been worn constantly in all kinds of weather, even subjected to the hot and drying sun day after day without the skins even needing glazing.

After considerable search Mrs. Gasow was able to show me why those five skins were rated as culls. Barely visible to the lay man's eye, there were blotches on two of the skins that she described as "singed." In those spots, and I could hardly see it, the guard hairs were singed at the very tips just as if they had been touched with a hot iron.

Quick change in temperature, she explained, is responsible for this singeing.

Monday will see eight of the Gasow mink at Grand Rapids for the international show from which Mrs. Gasow has come away in the last two years with ribbons. Her stock, however, has primed unusually early this year and she fears that the show will be too late to see them at their best.

Nevertheless they will be entered if only as a gesture of good sportsmanship. The whole spirit of mink showing is marvelous, Mrs. Gasow commented. Ranchers from far away California and Canada enter their specimens in the show even though the odds are far and away against the animals being shipped that distance with being singed, she said.

Mink raising, she told me, is really nothing new. Ranchers have perfected breeding strains for something like 20 or 30 years and the industry has seen a tremendous growth withing the last eight years.

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